



Marketplace Moments

Bibliophoria

Flickering Pixels

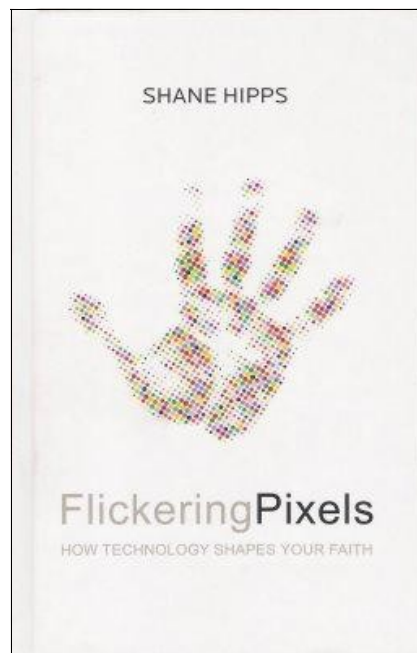
Shane Hipps

In this 2009 book published by Zondervan, [Shane Hipps](#), Lead Pastor of Trinity Mennonite Church builds upon his previous book (2006), *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and the Church*.

Covering almost the same ground as his previous book, Hipps draws heavily from the theories of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman. The main thesis of this book is very relevant for the Church. "Instead of simply resisting or caving in to (electronic) cultural forces, we are invited to study and understand them. Only then will we learn to use them rather than be used by them" (p.182).

This is a call for the Church to understand the power of the media and its positive and negative influences. Using his background in marketing, Hipps gave his readers a good overview of the consequences of the media. He defines the media as McLuhan did; that any technology that expands our senses and communication.

He suggests that the print media is what defined Western linear thinking. This was superseded by the image media which leads to postmodernism and now the electronic media which leads to virtual communities and virtual relationships. Two worthwhile quotes are "if oral culture is tribal and literate culture is individual, the electronic age is essentially a tribe of indi-



viduals" (p.107) and "if oral culture is intensely connected or empathic and print culture is distant or detached, then our electronic experience creates a kind of empathy at a distance" (p.108). Each media has its technological base from which it creates a cultural community around its uses and abuses.

Hipps' book, like his previous one is good in descriptive but not in prescriptive concerning how technology shapes our faith. Most of us are aware that technology does indeed shape our faith and we even agree with McLuhan that the "media is the message." What we want to know is how do we make sure that the message is not corrupted by the media. This is a good book in the ongoing dialogue of the Church and culture.

By Dr. Alex Tang

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Of the Heart and Mind

The Significance of "Boomz"

The recent Singlish vocabulary has added a new word to its' dictionary (I saw one recently at a bookstore). It is none other than "Boomz". This new word traces back to a short interview by then, Miss World Singapore; Ms Ris Low, who later renounced (or forced to give up by popular demand) her crown. The controversy started with the interview that Ms Low spoke in poor English with really bad diction. The Youtube snippet spread like wild fire on this little island state, starved of gossips and paparazzi worthy celebrity newsfeeds.

Behind the Ris Low story was a sad story of a youth, dealing with manic-depressive syndrome and credit card theft. She mentioned in an interview that she had signed up for the Miss World competition knowing that the rules stipulated a ban for those who have committed a felony to participate. Her rationale was that she did not go to jail, though convicted, and was on probation and not allowed to go shopping alone.

Further, she is a student at a private school studying life science and 'hospitality' but was also caught cheating in school. We surely 'understand' that the piece of note 'flew' into her pencil case.

Although we recognize that she is an exception rather than a norm, we need to reflect

on what factors has contributed to the existence of such a tragic figure? There are many who would wave their fingers at her, while others, more forgiving says that her manic-depressive syndrome is to blame. Both responses seems to me copouts from the heart of the matter.

As the gospel demands, each person must be given the opportunity to repent and turn over a new leaf. That is what Christ has done on the cross. Denying this denies the Cross. But the mindset of victimization is equally dangerous by blaming everything on a illness. Though I was not exhaustive in watching every news interview nor did I read every article, those that were "in depth" pieces did not really spell out much of her relationship with her parents except that she came from a well to do family and her father was restrictive in how she spends his money. What values are formed when she was growing up about money, beauty, etc?

Her ambition is to win a beauty pageant. She will try again in another competition. I am not personally against beauty pageants, but as an ambition?

As she said in her interview when asked about her fashion sense, she replied, "It shouts, me!" But, does she know who she really is? Do we know who we are? When everyone wants to be different, aren't we

quite the same?

Then comes another 'problematic problem', the new word, "boomz". Many people says words are only words and have no intrinsic meaning. So it doesn't matter what word we use. Well, try describing 'boomz'. Words do carry a cultural baggage and we both have to agree on the definition of words in order for me to say something and for you to understand. Behind the words, are real objects, feelings, institutions, concepts and ideas, that are intrinsic. It does not go away just because we say so. By redefining the word 'fat' and try to be politically correct to myself as being 'well insulated' does not eliminate the fact that I am a few kilos heavier than I ought to be.

We, in the developed world have been trying to play with words in politics, economics, philosophies, sex, marriage, beauty, age, religion, human rights etc. Rather than becoming more cohesive through honest dialogues, we as societies become less tolerant and inclusive. Ris has moralized and re-defined her credit card theft as non-criminal, enabling herself to join the pageant despite the rules. I sometimes joke that someone is not late when he arrives 10 mins after. In Indonesia, that 10 minutes is often 1 hour. Most people believe in God. However, our understanding of God differs widely. Boomz... By Timothy Liu

Eyes in a Darkened Room

Avatar

Went to see the movie "Avatar" on Christmas '09. "Avatar" is an incredible action movie. And James Cameron has done an outstanding job constructing the fantasy world that is Pandora. However, long before you hear the first battle cry of the Na'vi (the ingenious people of Pandora), you already know that you are in a "cowboys and Indians" movie. (Forgive the politically incorrect terms.) I like Stanley A. Miller II's review in the Journal Sentinel:

"Avatar" is big. Huge blue aliens, gigantic war machines and Jurassic-size wildlife make this sci-fi movie, which hit theaters Friday, a colossus.

Cascading with special effects and 3-D engineering, "Avatar" marvels at its own visually captivating technical superiority - and for many moviegoers, this brilliant style will be entertaining enough.

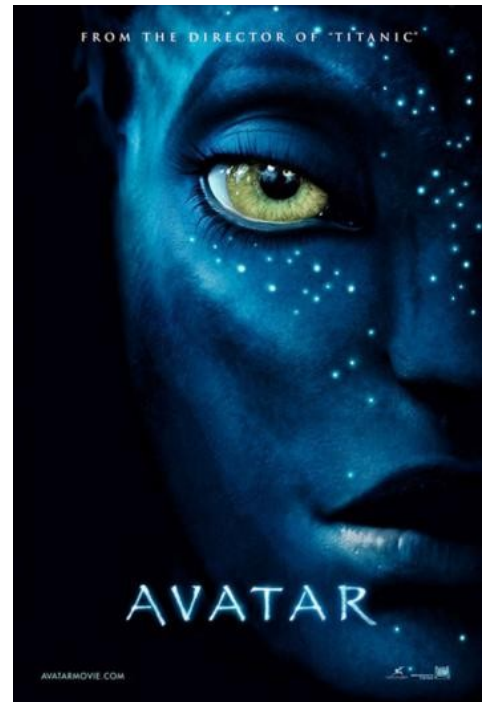
There is plenty of gee-whiz technology to keep the audience marveling over how they did this and that, so that, with any luck, viewers won't dwell too long on the derivative, unimaginative story and the shallow characters. ("Effects steal show in predictable 'Avatar,'" JSONline, 18 December, 2009.)]

Shallow characters indeed. How can we not fall in love with the two main characters, wanting them to fall in love and conquer all their enemies? How can we not hate the

evil Colonel? How can we not cheer when the Michelle Rodriguez character appears in war paint, and how could we not shed a tear of two when she goes down fighting? And whether in blue or in pink, isn't the hero just another white American kid who wins the day, and the lady, through his spunk, bravery, luck, superior violence and good old 'aw-shucks' cuteness? Shallow characters? Well, definitely stock characters.

But it is the story line that bugs me. I am old enough to see how the "cowboys and Indians" story line has evolved. When I was young, the cowboys were the good guys, poor struggling settlers trying to make a living in the American West. The Indians were cruel pagans who killed without mercy. We were glad when the cavalry finally arrives to save the day, killing the evil Indians, and saving the good cowboys.

Nowadays, the Indians or whatever indigenous group in a story, are the good guys, spiritual, loving, green, innocent. The cowboys are now the greedy, crass, exploiting imperialists ever ready to use force and trickery to bully the indigenous people for political and commercial gains. The roles have been reversed, The "cowboys" are now the bad guys and the "Indians" are the good guys and we just can't wait for the Indians to rise up and give the evil cowboys a bloody nose. "Avatar" is the latest offering of



this new "reality." As I watched "Avatar" I immediately thought of movies like "Dances With Wolves" and "The Last Samurai."

I have trouble with both the old and the new portrayals of cowboys and Indians. Why? "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 NET)]. But movies like "Avatar" divide the world into good guys and bad guys, and the bad guys are always the other side. How can we hope to build community in a pluralistic world with such a "us-them" approach to settling conflicts? We don't need this in Malaysia, or Nigeria, or anywhere. Truth is, the primary divide is not between human beings. The primary divide is between a Holy God and a fallen humanity. And we are all on the same side of this divide.

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Real World, Real Christian
(see www.gcf.org.sg)



My other main problem with movies like "Avatar" is that it portrays violence as the main way we solve complex human problems. Sure the Sigourney Weaver character advocates an approach to inter communal relations by literally entering the skin of the other community so that you can understand them better, hence the Avatar programme. And it is this approach that enables the hero to understand and then identify with the Na'vi. But all this is lost in the adrenaline charged pyrotechnics of the climactic battle scenes. Ya, ya we need to understand each other, yada, yada, yada, but the day is won by the good guys beating the c___ out of the bad guys.

Compare the Avatar type

approach to movies like Peter Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. The lesson there is that evil tempts us all and that we all must be vigilant against it. The lesson there is that the day is won when different types of people learn to work together for a common cause. The lesson there is that the day is won, finally, not through violence, but through love, and friendship, and faith, and loyalty. These are the lessons we need to hear in the dark days we live in.

Maybe I am too optimistic or too old. When a young person heard me complain that the storyline in "Avatar" was weak, he said, 'if I want a good story I read a book.' I presume that he was more than happy with the entertainment

value of "Avatar" and the ground breaking film making technology on show there. (Others obviously agree with my young friend. "Avatar" won "best drama" at the recent Golden Globes and her director, James Cameron, won the "best director" award.) I am afraid I have a higher regard for movies. They are the primary narratives of our day. And yes, I expect a good movie to entertain me, but I still look for something more. I still expect a good movie to also point me to truths that will strengthen my heart to be a better person, working for a better world. Hmm. . . anybody want to join me for another "Lord of the Rings" marathon?

Dr. Tan Soo-Inn